

S E R M O

PUBLISHED,

W ANDRING OF THE MIND
By Her MAJESTIES Special Command.

Printed before

THE QUEEN

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(2) 318

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A
S E R M O N

Concerning the
Wandering of the Mind

I N
G o d ' s S e r v i c e ,

Preached before the
Q U E E N ,

A T
W H I T E - H A L L ,
F E B R U A R Y 15. 1692.

By *THO. TENISON*, D. D. Chaplain in Ordinary to
T H E I R M A J E S T I E S .

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SEPMON

Wandering of the Mind

Good Service

OUR

WILL

FEELING

THEIR MAJESTY

MON

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A
S E R M O N
 CONCERNING THE
Wandering of the MIND
 IN
GOD's SERVICE.

I COR. vii. 35.

-----*That you may attend upon the Lord
 without distraction.*



THESE Words spake
 St. Paul in a time of Per-
 secution, and he spake
 them with special regard
 to it. During that sea-
 son he recommended to
 Christians a single Estate. He recom-
 mended it, but did not enjoin it, nor

A 3 make

make a matter of discretion, a necessary Duty. He gave not (therefore) this Counsel to all, but to those who *could receive it*. And upon this account it was that he then advis'd to that state of life. He consider'd that the Gospel was to be Preach'd in many Countries, with great Pains, and amidst equal Perils. And he well understood, that the less the Propagators of it were intangled in the Affairs of this Life, the more they would be at liberty to promote their holy Faith; The freer they would be from perplexity of Mind, and upon that account, the better dispos'd to *Attend upon the* [Service of the] *Lord* [Jesus] *without distraction*.

Upon occasion of these Words I shall (by God's help)

1st. Enquire into the Nature of the Distraction, or *wandring* of the Mind. Next to that,

2^{dly}. May

2dly. May be consider'd the great *Evil* of it, especially where it is indulg'd; and more especially when it is affected in the *Worship of God*. That Consideration will fitly introduce (in the

3d Place) *A Persuasive to Attention* and fixedness of Thought in God's Service; that the *Grace of God*, which is, in it self, of so inestimable a Value, may not by us be receiv'd in vain.

on I. The *General nature of the Wandring of the Mind*, consisteth neither in its musing upon many things, which increaseth knowledge; nor in *ballancing* one thing against another, which helpeth us to make a right judgment of them; nor yet in its passing from one matter to another, tho the objects are at a great distance; for they may have a *Connexion* in reason, tho they have it not in time or place; so it is (for example) with those great Objects, *Moses and Christ, Canaan and Heaven*. But

But then the Mind may be said to wander, when the Attention is removed from the matter which was properly before it, to something foreign, even then when the Meditation on that matter was fitly and usefully to be continued. So *Pilate* asked *what was Truth?* But he pursued not the Enquiry, neither staid he for the Answer of our Saviour, who was the only Oracle that could have given him a Resolution which would have left no doubt behind it.

This *distraction* of the Thought is sometimes a *Natural Infirmary*; and sometimes a wilful and affected Practice.

Sometimes the temper of the Brain is either over-hot and volatile, or cloudy, and heavy, and slow, in the Original frame of it; sometimes Afflictions and Diseases and throngs of Worldly Affairs snatch that Temper which was at first an

apt instrument of Sobriety and compo-
 sure of Mind. And generally the Mind
 is apt, instead of maintaining an orderly
 connexion of the Images of it, which
 requireth Pains and Judgment, to rove
 from one to another, by a kind of casu-
 al coherence. As, for *Example*, when
 there is mention made in Scripture of
 Christ and his Doctrine, as the true
Bread which came down from Heaven;
 the Imagination of the Reader or Hear-
 er who has not had his Senses orderly
 exercis'd and fix'd, is very apt to wander
 from that *Evangelical Food*, to the thought
 of the *Manna* of the *Israelites*; and from
 the *Manna*, to the *Wilderness* in which it
 fell, and from thence to the *Rock* in the
 Desert, which God *turned into a springing*
Well; and then peradventure he thinks of
 the Impatience of Thirst, and the refresh-
 ing of *Water*; and after that, the Fancy

is led into as many windings and turnings of musing, as the *Jews* say there were in that *River which followed them*. Thus the Mind is carried to such a distance from the *first thought*, as not to be able to tell, of a sudden, where the Imagination began, and in what manner it was continued.

We see and hear a great deal of this in the *Digressions* which are continually made both in Books and in Conversation; and may, to our great grief, feel the Byas of it in our selves when we appear before God in his holy House; where there is little need of our interrupting of one another by late coming, by Talk, or by irreverent Gesture, seeing our own Minds give themselves too much diversion.

The *natural Infirmary* which I have been speaking of, is, in some Persons carried on with such *Indulgence*, that it becomes
a Pre-

a *Presumption*. Such way is given to it, such content is taken in it, that it is properly a Man's own Act.

I shall not here discourse of all the kinds of this wilful Wandering; but only of the removing of the Attention, in part or in whole, from the Worship of God, and the carrying of it to something that is *vain* or *wicked*, or *indifferent*; or if *good*, as *improper* at that time, as would have been the practice of the Impotent man at *Bethesda*, if he had desired to have been carried afar off to a Physician, in that juncture when the Angel had been just moving the Waters, or when Christ himself was by the Porch.

This is the manner of those who in God's House are *present* in *body*, and *absent* in *spirit*; who with cold Formality, repeat religious Words, not minding the important sense of them; who *bear* as

if they *beard* not; who *read* with such Negligence, as not to *understand*, even where the matter is not beyond a Capacity which has not much depth; who see the *Holy Elements*, and think of *common Tables*, and wander with their *Appetite*, as well as their *Thought*: Who *draw nigh to God with their lips*, whilst *their hearts are far from him*; or possibly their *Hearts* are elsewhere so perfectly engaged, that they neither *caule the lip to move*, nor the *knee to bow*.

But, to press Wandering from the mind. 2dly. The distemper of *wandering*, whether it be *natural* or *acquir'd*, is no small Evil, especially when we should draw nigh to God in Religious Assemblies.

1. Even there where it is a *natural* *infirmity*

infirmity, it is attended with great inconvenience.

It hinders us in the search of such *Truths*, as depend upon any number of Consequences. Where there is not Attention, such Truths will not be found: It is from the same *Root*, that both *Credulity* and *Scepticism* spring. It is from want of closeness of Thought, that some believe any thing, and others nothing. Hence also is prevented *Resolution of Will*, so necessary in a good matter, and attain'd only by such a judgment, as, being fixed it self, fixeth the *Purpose*. And, for the utmost degree of Inconsistency of Thought, 'tis no other than Madness. From lower degrees of it, proceed great defects in a Man's *Duty* to *God*, his Neighbour, or himself, whilst the mind starts from that which is before it, and leaves it unfinished

nish'd, reversing the Counsel of the wise-
 Eccl. 9. 10. man, '*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to*
'do, do it with thy might. So serviceable
 to all Business, Civil or Sacred, is the ap-
 plication of the mind.

It is true, that very devout Persons are
 subject to the *Infirmity of Wandring*; it
 being difficult, amidst such a variety of *I-*
images in the head, to keep one certain
 line of them straight and continued; and
 our great Adversary, in the midst of our
 best Thoughts, is busie in darting in such
 Suggestions, as by their suddenness, their
 incoherence, their contrariety, both to our
 present Thoughts and Affections, and
 Prayers; their Black and Diabolical na-
 ture, shew that they are of *their Father*
the Devil.

And tho it is in *Divinity* as in the *Ci-*
vil Law, by which the Trees planted in
 another Man's Ground, are not, till they
 take

take root, judged the Property of the Owner of the Soil; tho evil Suggestions, till by our consent they are rooted in our hearts, are not our proper thoughts, but either the Devil's Temptations, or natural Infirmities, which the Merciful God, who considers our Frame, will not impute to such in whom *the spirit is willing, and the flesh weak*; yet it is an unhappy and uncomfortable Circumstance which they ought to pray and strive against, and to the utmost of their Skill and Power abate, bearing with Patience the Weakness they cannot conquer, till God Almighty in his good time shall work the blessed Alteration in them.

But then,

2dly. When Men allow and indulge themselves in this roving of Imagination, and when they do so even in the Worship of God,

Then

Then 1st. *Their sin is exceeding sinful.*
And,

2dly. *Their Condition is very dangerous.*

1. *Their sin is exceeding sinful*, both in it self, and the Fountain whence it proceeds.

1. This Practice flows from a *corrupt heart*, which wants the *love of God*. For where the *Treasure is, there will the heart be also*. If therefore the Heart valued God and Goodness, if it truly lov'd his Honour, and its own Salvation, it would not perpetually go astray from them, but be there *fixed where true joys are to be found*. The *Israelites* when they were out of *Egypt* with their Bodies, in
 Acts 7. 39. *their hearts they turned back again into Egypt*; its Idols pleasing their imaginations, and its fruits their Appetites; but the *holy woman* in the Gospel, who

who chose the good part, whose Affection was chiefly placed upon the *One thing necessary*, the late, in the posture, and with the attention, of a *Disciple at Jesus feet, and heard his word.* Luke 10. 39, 42.

2. The root of this practice, *the want of the love of God*, being so evil, the practice cannot but partake of the irreligious nature of it.

Wilful Wandering in God's service is a kind of *Contempt of God*, and a coming into his Presence to slight him; to affront him to his face; and it gives him just occasion to complain, as in *Jer. 23. 11. In my House I have found wickedness.* It is a preferring of our own ways and thoughts before his: nay, 'tis the preferring of the *Injections* of the Devil, to whom we give place, by receiving of them into the room of *pious meditations.*

Prov. 23.
26.

It is likewise a disobedient *refusal of his call*, when he says with Importunity as well as Authority, *My son give me thine heart.*

It disappoints the *Ends* designed by God's wisdom in his *Service*, *his own glory*, and the *edification of the Worshippers*; for, by such hypocrisie which withdraws the best part of Man's Service (that which is inward, judicious, hearty) and substitutes that which is scarce a shew of Devotion, God is rather *mock'd* than *honour'd*: and those who are present in his House with thoughts *ranging* in the world, can neither improve in *Knowledge* nor *Faith*, nor *Devotion*, nor *Morality*; seeing they attend not to the means and exercises of them: For our *Spiritual* is not like our *Natural* Stature, which grows up, whether we think or *think not* of it. Observable are the words of the Apostle.

Con-

Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Add to this, the great aggravation of *ingratitude* in Sinners of this kind, who stand in such need of the *especial grace* of God, and whom God's extraordinary Goodness hath obliged with the means of it; for after all this they despise *his* and their *own* mercies, and use the Grace of God (as they ought to do the World) with an indifferency, and *as if they used it not*.

This undervaluing of the Riches of God's Love, instead of giving him thanks; this neglect of means, instead of embracing and using them for the improvement of our very imperfect nature; this spending of good hours to such ill purpose, is not only *wicked*, but

2dly. Exceeding perillous, as indeed all wickedness is; for how pleasant soever

vain Thoughts are, and how charming soever this Paradise in which the Fool wanders, may for a season seem to him ; yet the immediate consequence is evil, and the end of these things are shame and death.

Distraction abateth the *zeal* of the Heart, as the scattering of the Rays does the heat of the Sun ; and when Men are either cold or luke-warm in their *duty*, they are robb'd of the *Comfort* of it : they cannot take *delight* in that which they mind not.

The service of God is a weariness to *those* whose Thoughts and Affections are elsewhere entangled. So it was to the *Israelites*, who groan'd even under their Priviledge, and said, ' When will ' the *Sabbath* be over that we may set ' forth wheat ?

And

And for *Almighty God*, how can we imagine that *he* will mind those Services of ours, which *we* our selves do not ; He cannot but observe them, but it is with the Animadversion of a Judge, and in order to punishment : and *it is a fearful thing*, (in such a manner, and in so ill a cause) *to fall into the hands of the living God*. He will make good his threatning in *Jer. 6. 19. I will bring upon this people the fruit of their thoughts.*

Now the Considerations of the *Wickedness*, and the *Peril* of wilful and affected wandering in the Service of God, do fitly prepare the way to the Third Part of this *Discourse*.

3. A *persuasive* to *Attention*, without which we cannot be either innocent, or safe, or useful.

Give, therefore, to God not a *mechanical* but a *reasonable* service. Let him have
more

more than the bodily Engine, and the natural spring of it, by which the Eyes, and Hands, and Lips, and Knees, are mov'd. Consider that when all the Forces of Soul and Body are united, They are still an imperfect Oblation; how much more when they are divided and weak'ned by the Thoughts and Affections running in many and in crooked Channels.

Offer, then, to him what is his due, and that which pleaseth him best, and that which becomes a Man, the Soul, the intention, the inward reverence; give him it with *judgment*; not repeating (for example sake) the *Ministers proper parts*, such as *Absolution* and *Benediction*, as the manner of some is. Give him it in its place and in its season; perform that sincerely which you come to do: If any other thing be then thought of, tho' in its general nature, *indifferent*, nay *tho'*
good,

good, it is *improper*, and takes us away from our particular duty at a time when we should solemnly perform it. He (for instance) do's ill in God's Cause who reads the very *Scriptures* in the Time of the *Prayers*.

He that is in Honour and hath understanding of it, he that considers how excellent a Creature Man is as God made him, such a one will not be easie in doing any thing *unseasonably* and *impertinently*; much less will he forgive himself for thinking with pleasure on *God's Day* only on his own *six days Labours*, or (which are much worse) his *Vanities*. Eccl. 2. 14. and *loosnesses of Life*. *The wise man's* Prov. 17. *Eyes are in his Head*, but a *fools Eyes* ²⁴ *are at the ends of the Earth*: Endeavour, therefore, to *attend* on the Lord; *not as fools but as wise*, saying in this sense, *our hearts are fixed, O God, our hearts are fixed.* Now

Now because we are subject to the Infirmary of giddiness and misattention, and to an indulgence of infirm Nature; and, likewise to the Insults of that Adversary, who studies to give the greatest interruption to us when we are most religiously employ'd; a meer *dissuasive* from wandering is not sufficient for us, unless we also understand and use fit *Helps* against *Distraction of thought*.

And for *Helps*, some are but *pretended* ones, and will deceive us.

Others are *real*, and will, at least prevent much of our Distemper, if they cannot wholly cure it.

First, Amongst the *pretended Helps* which will deceive us, I shall mention two.

1. The

The *First* is that of the *Romanists*, who prescribe *the use of an Image*, as a proper Instrument for the fixing the Mind by the Assistance of Sense. Whereas, by this means the Eye draws down the Mind from the Prototype to the Type, from the Creator to the Creature; and the Image is turn'd into an Idol, and the Immediate Phantasm (which is made by the sight of it) is that which is most thought of and ador'd. So that this second Object distracts the Mind, instead of fixing it where it should be truly plac'd; and gives it a diversion by those Bodily Appearances which do not at all appertain to the most high God whom we worship, and *whom only we should serve*.

A second pretended Help against wandering of Mind, is *unpremeditated Prayer*. For the *Novelty* of it will, they presume, engage the Attention, whilst that to which

D

Men

Men are accustom'd will be formally repeated.

To which it may be said, that such as come in good earnest to serve God, will attend much more to an ancient Service, which is judicious and grave, than to any new one which is raw and undigested.

That those who officiate (being not inspir'd) unless great Ability and long Use have given them an extraordinary Talent, are *distracted* betwixt *Invention* and *Elocution*; they are forc'd not so much to mind what they say, as to study what they shall say: and those who bear are distracted also, betwixt *Affenting* and saying *Amen*, and considering, in a new Matter, whether they can say *Amen* to it or not.

Nor can it be imagin'd that the *Hearers* should not *rove* if the *Speakers* do.

Wherefore, not trusting to pretended
Helps,

Helps, let us (2dly) make use of those which are *real*. And they are many.

Our Infirmary of thought is help'd.

By some *Order* in thinking, tho' it be not nice and Philosophical, but such as we may learn even from common Catechisms, and Sums of *Christian Religion*.

By freeing our selves, as much as may be, from *worldly Incumbrance*; and by banishing Care, which perplexeth the Mind, and choaketh the good thoughts of it.

By *preserving the Temper* from being broken with Adversity, through that evenness which proceedeth from Resignation to God.

By keeping the *Affairs of the other days of the Week* from intrenching too much upon those of the *first*; so the *Jews* began their Sabbath about Midnight; and how (for Example sake) is it possi-

sible for those to be undistracted in God's Service, who come into a Church on the *Lord's-Day*, full of the Images of a *Theater* frequented on the *Eve* of it?

Further our *Infirmity is help'd*, by a *particular Application* to God against wandering in his Service, when we are just entering upon it.

By our *immediate* checking and recalling of our *Thoughts*, as soon as we perceive them to be stepping aside; and by taking a holy *Revenge* upon our selves, especially in private, in repeating that to which we less attended, till we are satisfied in our attention to it.

It is further assisted, by the consideration of the *Majesty* of him we worship; by laying to Heart the *moment of the Service* it self, and making it case of *Life and Death* eternal, which will almost force us to attend to it

By

By the *Time* consider'd, as separated from common Use and servile Labour.

By the *Place*, thought upon as *dreadful*, or as God's especial Presence.

By the *decency* of the *Place* fitted for a Religious Assembly, without *variety of superstitious Figures*, such especially as we see in many Romish Churches, where they serve for Pomp, rather than Edification, and for the refreshing of those to whom the unedifying sound of an unknown Language, would else be very tedious.

Images, and such-like *Ornaments*, amuse the Fancy, and draw away the Attention from the Service of God, which is the Business for which such Buildings are erected, and where it sufficeth if they be convenient, clean and decent.

Furthermore, our Infirmary is help'd by *Scriptures* and Services in a *known Tongue*;
for

for how shall a Man attend to that which he does not understand?

Also by the *good Method* and Order of that which is deliver'd; and by *liturgical Words*, well chosen, and ready prepar'd. For a Service, which is well weigh'd, and generally approv'd of, and at hand for use, leaves the Mind at more freedom for the exercise of its Devotion: It hath nothing then to do, but to add to *good Words*; religious fervour of Mind, which by the intenseness of it, will keep off Foreign Ideas; The Birds will not light upon the Sacrifice whilst it is flaming.

Nor are those frequent *breaks* in Liturgy inconsiderable Helps to the common People, who are lost in a long-continued Service; whilst they are able to attend to that which is short, and after a small pause, to renew their Attention to a following *Ejaculation* or *Collect*: and to them those
short

short *Ejaculations*, which the ignorant revile as *sbreds of Prayer*, are real *Helps of Devotion*.

Last of all ; God, by *his Spirit*, helps the Spirit of Man in the use of good Means, when, with profound Humility, and fervent Devotion, he prays for it.

After all this, let no Man excuse himself upon the *impossibility of perfect steadiness of Mind*.

The first Motions to wandring can scarcely be, at all times, prevented ; but the continuance of them is our own Act and Choice. In *Waters*, a small Circle, made by any thing cast in, is enlarg'd into a greater, and so multiplied, till at last the whole Surface becomes uneven ; but it needs not be so in the *deep* of the Heart which is a *voluntary Agent*. That which cannot be help'd, shall not be answer'd for : but much may be help'd ; and if it be not, such distraction

straction is beyond Apology. All vain, all wicked Thoughts which we delight in, are our own; and proceed not so much from the Frailty of Nature, as the Pollution of the Heart.

And happier, much happier is the Condition of the Ideot, who cannot think with any tolerable consistence; or the *sick Person*, whose Fever rageth, and not himself, than a Man who has a good Capacity, and is a Master of Method; yet, when he is upon the great Business of saving his Soul, takes up all his thoughts with his Farms and his Oxen, his Trade and Merchandize, his Politicks or secular Studies.

And for those pious Worshippers, whose minds are weak, and memories frail, and by Age, or other Causes, past the recovery of the soundness of them, let them not be so discouraged as to forbear God's Worship, because they do it with such
im-

imperfection. The Patalitic must move on, tho' they shake every step, they make way, tho' slowly; and they will, at last *finish their Course with joy*. That which the Apostle saith of *Charity*, is true of *Piety*; *If there be a willing mind it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not*.

It is confess'd, that one end of our coming together in Religious Assemblies, is the giving a *publick Sign* of our Communion with God's Church, which is done by *our presence*, and our decent behaviour there. But there is something more requir'd; the paying of our *actual Homage* to God, by the Dedication of Soul and Body to him, and the attending to the *holy Offices*, as means appointed by God for our instruction, reproof, encouragement, and comfort; and the conveying to us his especial Grace and Blessing.

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It

It is true, the *Liturgy* is a settled Form, and gives not daily new entertainment to Mens Fancies; but it is such, as being often repeated, may yet please and benefit the *Devout*.

The Scriptures are always the same, but they are a great deep of *Divine Wisdom*; and every time a Man attends to them, he may possibly find something instructive and useful, which before he observ'd not.

It is certain that we cannot hear *Moses* and the Prophets in Person: But God's good Providence hath convey'd their writings down to us, and we must read and hear them.

It is true, that *Solomon*, whose Wisdom drew Hearers from the Ends of the Earth, do's not now *speake himself*, but his *Works* do.

It is confel'd, that *Christ* who *spake as never man spake*, is in the Heavens, but his *written word* is in his Church, and a might-

ty Power goes along with it wheresoever there is a teachable and attentive Disposition.

It is also humbly acknowledg'd, that there are great Imperfections in the Ministers of the Church; yet Christ hath been pleas'd, in *earthen Vessels*, to convey to the World the rich *Treasure* of his Gospel.

Let us therefore receive the Gift without despising the meanness of the Messengers; and mind not so much who the Person is that speaks, as that *which is said*, and the Divine Authority, from whence he has Commission to preach the Doctrine of the *Messiah*.

Finally, Let us make devout supplication to Almighty God, who hath caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning; praying him to grant, That we may in such wise read, hear, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of his Holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed Hope of everlasting Life, which he hath given us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

F I N I S.